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15 October 1966

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Comments on Secretary McNamara's Trip Report

SUMMARY

We endorse Secretary McNamara's evaluation of the situation and his prescriptive analysis of what needs to be done. We have problems with his proposed package of "recommended actions" and serious difficulties with the details of some of the actions recommended, particularly the "press for negotiation" recommendations which we feel would be counterproductive. We consider his prognosis too gloomy. If the odds for enlivening the pacification program are indeed "less than even," present U.S. objectives in Vietnam are not likely to be achieved. ✓

1. Evaluation of the Situation: Secretary McNamara's evaluation of the situation is sound, perceptive and very much in line with our own appreciation. We agree that the struggle "for the complicity of the people" is "the important war," though we feel that the important struggle is not just for the "complicity" of the people but, rather, for their engagement, for a degree of active participation whereby they come to identify their fortunes with the political institutions and instruments of a non-Communist Saigon government. The only part of Secretary McNamara's evaluation with which we would take issue is its concluding sentence. We believe that despite the errors and administrative weaknesses of present programs, in the concept of revolutionary development (which involves much more than surface "pacification") we have found the right formula, a catalyst

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TS 188868/66

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~~TOP SECRET~~ MORI/CDF pp1-5

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that is potentially capable of inspiring the Vietnamese into effective action. Revolutionary development, however, involves fundamental structural and attitudinal changes in Vietnamese society which even perfectly conceived and managed programs could not effect overnight. Thus, in spite of organizational weaknesses and performance shortfalls in our present programs, it is far too early to write them off as discouraging failures. Serious and systematic effort in this field is really a post-Honolulu Conference development and it would be unrealistic to expect dramatic, readily quantifiable progress in the short span of eight months.

2. Recommended Actions: We agree that "we must continue to press the enemy militarily, " that "we must make demonstrable progress in pacification, " and that "progress in pacification, more than anything else, will persuade the enemy to negotiate or withdraw. " (The last point is in our view the most important one made in the whole report. It should be highlighted, not buried in a parenthetical aside at the end of paragraph 2.d.). We also agree that the U. S. should adopt a military posture that unmistakably signals its readiness to stick out a long war. Yet, though we agree with Secretary McNamara's prescriptive analysis of what needs to be accomplished, we do not believe the specific action mix he recommends would accomplish these objectives and feel that some elements of this recommended mix (particularly the "press for negotiations") would actually be counterproductive.

3. The key problem here lies in the fact that the U.S. simply cannot try to work both sides of the street and hope for any kind of success. On the one hand, we can keep the Communists under pressure and militarily at bay while we endeavor to help the South Vietnamese build a viable political structure and while at the same time we adopt a posture on negotiations which will put the onus on Hanoi, minimize domestic and international pressures on the U.S., and avoid detrimental effect on our political efforts within South Vietnam. Or, we can adopt a course of action which has some genuine chance of getting Hanoi to the table within the reasonably near term future. We cannot realistically hope to do both simultaneously.

4. Specific Action Recommendations: We have the following comments on the specific actions recommended in Secretary McNamara's report.

TS 188868/66

Copy No. 4**TOP SECRET**

**TOP SECRET**

a. U.S. force levels: A U.S. force level of 470,000 will be sufficient to punish the enemy at the large-unit operations level and to keep the enemy's main forces from interrupting pacification only if the increase over present levels is primarily in maneuver battalions (not support elements) and if measures to check the enemy's buildup through infiltration are effective.

b. The barrier: In order to achieve the objectives set for the barrier in our view it must be extended well westward into Laos. Air interdiction of the routes in Laos unsupplemented by ground action will not effectively check infiltration.

c. ROLLING THUNDER: We concur in Secretary McNamara's analysis of the effects of the ROLLING THUNDER program, its potential for reducing the flow of essential supplies, and his judgment on the marginal inutility of added sorties against lines of communication. We endorse his argument on stabilizing the level of sorties. We do not agree, however, with the implied judgment that changes in the bombing program could not be effective. We continue to judge that a bombing program directed both against closing the port of Haiphong and continuously cutting the rail lines to China could have a significant impact.

d. Pacification: We agree that revolutionary development (pacification) must be pursued vigorously, and that success in pacification depends on the interrelated factors Secretary McNamara catalogues. Although "the U.S. cannot do this ... job for the Vietnamese," neither can the Vietnamese do it alone -- we must integrate our efforts. We agree that corruption is a serious problem and the attitude of GVN officials must be improved, but we do not believe that these problems have to be solved at the top before attempting to make pacification cadre effective. We must work at both ends of the Vietnamese command chain simultaneously; working unilaterally if necessary at the lower end. We concur in the comments on ARVN.

TS 188868/66

Copy No. 4

**TOP SECRET**

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e. The management of the U.S. pacification effort needs improvement. We are not sure just what Secretary McNamara's first recommended solution really involves. If it involves only minor cosmetic surgery on the present arrangement, it is unlikely to succeed. If Secretary McNamara is proposing real organizational change under which the civilian director would have a joint staff of sufficient scope to enable him to plan, control and direct the U.S. effort and have operational control over all -- not just civilian -- elements engaged in revolutionary development activities, then we support his recommendation wholeheartedly. "A carefully delineated division of responsibility between the civilian-in-charge and an element of COMUSMACV under a senior officer," however, does not look to us like the unified control and management arrangement necessary or an arrangement which would give the civilian director sufficient authority over U.S. military pacification activities.

f. A civilian pacification structure cannot be given a "fair trial" unless the civilian director has the necessary authority. Also, the trial will not be "fair" if major quantifiable results are anticipated in a matter of months. Further, even if a particular civilian-headed administrative structure does not work, the fact remains that revolutionary development (which is what we ought to be talking about, not pacification) can only succeed if it is something in which the civil populace engages itself. If an attempt is made to impose pacification on an unengaged populace by GVN or U.S. military forces, that attempt will fail.

g. Negotiations: While we agree that the U.S. must maintain an open posture toward negotiations for domestic and international political reasons, we do not believe we should actively press for negotiations until definite progress has been made in the revolutionary development/pacification program. Otherwise, we will be negotiating from a position of weakness and running a great risk of undercutting what we are trying to develop politically within South Vietnam.

TS 188868/66

Copy No. 4

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h. Shifting the air effort from the northeast quadrant to the infiltration areas in Laos and southern North Vietnam would be quite unproductive. Such a course of action would not induce Hanoi to negotiate (since it would still involve bombing of the north) and would probably have little effect in changing present international attitudes. Furthermore, a concentration of sorties against the low-yield and elusive targets along the infiltration routes in the southern end of North Vietnam and in Laos would not appreciably diminish North Vietnam's ability to maintain the supply of its forces in South Vietnam.

i. For a variety of diplomatic, image and psychological warfare considerations, much needs to be done on imaginative amnesty programs. However, any U.S. effort at the present time to sponsor proposals which would give the VC a role in the government of South Vietnam would have very adverse effects on the morale and determination of our South Vietnamese allies.

4. Prognosis: We agree with Secretary McNamara's prognosis that there is little hope for a satisfactory conclusion of the war within the next two years. We do not agree that "the odds are less than even" for enlivening the pacification program. If this were true, the U.S. would be foolish to continue the struggle in Vietnam and should seek to disengage as fast as possible. We think that if we establish adequate management and control on the U.S. side and ensure that the Vietnamese follow through on redirecting their military resources as promised, there are at least fair prospects for substantial progress in pacification over the next two years.

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